



Open forum held at Fenley Field on 23rd February 2020

Welcome from Andy Spriggs – Chairman OLRFC

Andy welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the purpose of the get together which was essentially to set out where we are now and where we see the future. Andy then introduced Pete Jenkins the chairman of both the Old Laurentian Society and the Laurentian Sports Club.

Where we are now.

Pete advised the meeting that the land and buildings at Fenley Field are owned by the society; more precisely the Laurentian Charitable Trust, a registered charity and Charitable Incorporated Organisation. Pete ran through the history of the rugby club and its close links with the society. Originally the rugby club played at the Hart Field, Lawrence Sheriff School's sports facility on Lower Hillmorton Road. In 1939 Lol Fenley together with a couple of fellow Old Laurentians purchased the land at Lime Tree Avenue for £5000. During the war the land was used for the cultivation of vegetables and it wasn't until peace broke out that the ground was used for its intended purpose. OLRFC played their first match at Fenley Field in September 1945 with a clubhouse which looked like a demobilised nissen hut, which it was!

Pete quickly ran through the highlights of how we got to the present situation where Bellway Homes plc are still very much interested in purchasing Fenley Field. However, they understand the rugby club must have a new home to move to, as without that Sport England will prevent any planning application succeeding in respect of the land at Fenley Field.

At present Bellway are the only interested party, as only they have a ready-made access to the site via Malcolm Cashmore's paddock. Whilst the society has previously looked at other sites including Bilton Grange, Rugby School and a couple of other possibilities the current potential target is close to the "straight mile" where the current owner, Stuart Mitchell, is interested in talking to us regarding a potential lease. Howkins and Harrison are assisting the society in this respect on a no win no fee basis.

So far, a report has been submitted to Warwickshire County Council highways department regarding access to the proposed site via Straight Mile. To date, the indication is that they are supportive. Bellway commissioned the report. The thinking is that Bellway will fund the construction of a new clubhouse (perhaps through the utilisation of Section 106 money). It seems that Sport England and the RFU would both support the move.

At this stage Pete asked for questions from the floor.

What might the timescale look like? 3/5 years to completion, providing we receive an acceptable offer from Bellway. It could take 12 months to get the agreement of all interested parties. In the meantime, we have to get something done about the drive as Rugby Borough Council have indicated that they could stop waste collections if it gets any worse.

What if Bellway pull the plug? As it stands Bellway have been talking to us for just short of four years and have never indicated that they might withdraw. The fact that they are incurring costs to find us a new home suggests they are very keen.



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Would the new facility cater for multiple sports? Yes, the site we are looking at could accommodate far more than just a rugby club. There could be an all-weather hockey facility and other possibilities if the demand is there. At this stage no decisions can be made.

Could we move somewhere closer? Now that the local plan has been published and adopted other options will be very limited. With the “straight mile” less than three miles away, this move will actually be less of a distance than the move from Hart Field to Fenley Field 75 years ago.

What protection could we get as a result of moving to a leasehold facility? In all probability the landlord would have similar issues gaining planning consent for house building as Sport England would seek to block a planning application resulting in the loss of playing facilities. The terms of any lease would in any event be subject to negotiation and the society would look to buy some freehold land with some of the sale proceeds to ensure that the rugby club has a home for as long as it is needed.

How in bed are we with Howkins and Harrison? There is no obligation. Howkins and Harrison are working on a no win no fee basis. They are a well-respected local firm with a wide network in the agricultural community. Bellway are already a client of theirs. They will be hoping that should this plan come to fruition, they will be engaged by the society to manage a portfolio of commercial properties purchased out of the sale proceeds of Fenley Field.

What is happening about the drive and how will it be funded? There is a possibility that we could get an interest free loan from the RFU. We will need to demonstrate an ability to repay. In all probability we will need to look at doing some fundraising. We are also looking at an option to “repair only for now”, using “friends” from within.

Could we develop existing site? A rough estimate of rebuilding the clubhouse and resurfacing the drive comes to around £1.5million. We have no assets to offer as security so borrowing the money is not a realistic possibility. Fundraising this much is also unrealistic in the short term. We did have plans to sell a strip of land next to Malcolm Cashmore’s paddock but Sport England and the RFU were not keen to support.

Is there a bus service to the new site? Not now, but there could very well be in the future.

Could we talk to landowners ourselves? We could, but Howkins and Harrison are seasoned professionals and should be better than we would be at negotiating terms.

What about hockey? We hope that they would come with us. A new hockey pitch might be adequate incentive.

What does the future hold for OLRFC? There is not enough space to grow at Fenley Field and the pitches are wearing out. The M & Js need more space and we need to keep that going for the long-term future of the club. Clubs without M&Js have folded and will continue to do so. A 4G pitch would help prevent overuse of existing facilities but this seems unlikely at present.



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Do we need 32 acres? Probably not, but if that is what is on offer, we will take it.

How do we ensure that new facility is not soulless? All memorabilia to be moved to new site (including the fireplace!) together with more that people probably have in their attics. Kevin Cossar (Trustee of the Laurentian Charitable Trust) cited Barkers Butts as a club that had moved but still has a clubhouse with character.

What about the numbers? James Melvin (trustee of the Laurentian Charitable Trust) made it clear that if the numbers don't stack up when Bellway make their offer then the move might never happen.

A show of hands at the end of the meeting suggested that the majority of those present supported the idea of a move.

Andy Spriggs and Pete Jenkins thanked everyone for their attendance and for all the very positive feedback from the floor. Pete Jenkins rounded off by saying; "we have a long way to go, but we are now a bit closer to the starting line".

The meeting closed at 1.10pm.